

Jewish Cemetery Chapel,
"Beth Ha-Chaim" (House of Life)
North side Kronprindsens Gade at
Jewish Cemetery entrance
West of City Limits *Kronprindsens Quarter*
Charlotte Amalie VICINITY
St. Thomas
Virgin Islands

HABS No. VI-14

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Washington Planning and Service Center
1730 North Lynn Street
Arlington, Virginia

JEWISH CEMETERY CHAPEL, "BETH HA-CHAIM" (HOUSE OF LIFE)

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Location: North side Kronprindsens Gade at Jewish Cemetery Entrance, West of City Limits, Charlotte Amalie Vicinity, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands.

Present Owner: St. Thomas Jewish Congregation of Blessing and Peace and Acts of Piety.

Present Use: Cemetery Chapel.

Statement of Significance: A companion structure to the St. Thomas Synagogue at Krystal Gade 16A and B, the cemetery chapel is a simple but interesting structure. The Sephardic rites and traditions, which the St. Thomas congregation observe, require a separate building for funerals.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: St. Thomas Jewish Congregation of Blessing and Peace and Acts of Piety.
2. Date of erection: 1837. The building is dated over the entrance gate 5597 in the Jewish calendar, which corresponds with A.D. 1837. The oldest grave in the cemetery dates from the same year. Prior to this time the Jewish congregation used a cemetery at Silke Gade and Jøde Gade. The date inscribed on the gate is accepted as the date of erection for the chapel.

The style of the building would not contradict this date, and since the cemetery was used for the first time in that year and the rites of the congregation required a cemetery chapel, one must have been built then. There is no evidence that this chapel has replaced an earlier one in this cemetery. The cemetery lies just outside the area included in the Hingelberg Map of Charlotte Amalie of 1836-37.

3. Notes on alterations and additions: No apparent alterations.

Prepared by Dr. Osmund R. Overby, Architect
National Park Service
August 1965

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural interest and merit: Companion building to the Synagogue.
2. Condition of fabric: Well maintained; in continuous use as cemetery chapel.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: One story, load bearing masonry, octagonal. Almost 28' in diameter.
2. Foundations: Probably brick and stone rubble masonry.
3. Wall construction: Probably brick and stone rubble masonry with brick around the openings, all surfaces well plastered.
4. Openings: doorways and doors: Two doorways, one each on north and south sides. Slightly wider than single windows on each of the other six sides. All openings have pointed arches (approximately equilateral). All have wooden exterior shutters, vertical plank outside and three panel inside. No interior shutters. No splay in reveals.
5. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Eight sided cone with sheet metal covering (painted red) on beaded wooden planks supported by rafters with an elaborate system of cross bracing made up of two cross ties from sill to sill, king post, supplementary cross ties, and much diagonal bracing. Roof flares slightly near eave line. Wooden finial at top.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: Simple band cornice at top of wall. Gutter encompasses roof and drains

to exposed riveted metal cistern at left rear.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: Simple octagon, single room.
2. Flooring: Patched concrete floor with incised square pattern.
3. Wall and ceiling finish: Lime plaster painted grey inside and outside. Exposed wooden ceiling painted white.
4. Doorways and doors: None.
5. Hardware: Wrought iron pintles, strap hinges, hooks, eyes, and box lock.
6. Lighting: Two fixtures for single candles hung from cross tie.
7. Heating: No facilities.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: Entrance faces south; freestanding building 15 feet from entrance gate to Jewish Cemetery; located in cemetery area in west Charlotte Amalie.
2. Enclosures: A fence of brick and stone rubble, laid in lime mortar and patched with cement, borders the entire cemetery. There is a plastered masonry entrance with wrought iron picket two-leaf gate.
3. Walks: Concrete steps down three risers from gate to concrete walk to chapel. Concrete rain catcher around periphery of building is dished. About one foot wide.
4. Landscaping: Palms and various other trees and flowers in unkept cemetery.

Prepared by Philip E. Gardner, Architect
National Park Service
Summer 1958